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## U.S. Suggests It Would Allow Weapons For Iran in Return for Hostages' Release

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The Reagan administration has suggested that it might relax—albeit not end—its six-year effort to halt shipments of military equipment and spare parts to Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages in Lebanon and a halt to Iranian support for international terrorism, U.S. officials said.

Officials said they hope at least two more Americans held by a pro-Iranian group in Lebanon. Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson and educator Thomas Sutherland, will be released soon. Anglican Church envoy Terry Waite told a news conference in Wiesbaden, West Germany that there are "reasonably strong indications" that the Islamic Jihad—or Islamic Holy War—might release the two Americans. The group freed one hostage, David Jacobsen, last weekend, but it isn't known what led to his release.

Washington officials declined to comment on a claim by the speaker of the Iranian Parliament that Iran recently detained and expelled former U.S. National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane and four aides. The speaker said the men were on a secret mission to Tehran on behalf of President Reagan. An aide to Mr. McFarlane also wouldn't comment and Mr. McFarlane couldn't be reached for comment.

But U.S. officials acknowledged that the administration has told Iran through intermediaries that it is willing to consider looking the other way while that country buys some military spare parts, possibly from China and other countries friendly to the U.S. But the officials stressed that the administration isn't prepared to abandon all efforts to restrict the flow of military equipment to Iran or to permit the Iranians to acquire offensive weaponry that could tip the balance in Iran's six-year-old war with Iraq.

The reports out of Washington, coupled with political tensions in Iran and the wor-

sening state of the Iranian military, combined to produce a flurry of activity in the hostage drama.

"The Iranians are in much worse shape than they've let on, both politically and economically," said one U.S. official.

White House and State Department spokesmen yesterday refused to restate the administration's longstanding policy of denying arms and spare parts to Iran. "This whole situation is being handled in another locale," said State Department spokesman Charles Redman.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes urged reporters to "be a little careful on reporting" news that could impede efforts to free the hostages.

All this comes at a time when there are unconfirmed reports in the Middle East that the 86-year-old Iranian leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, had suffered a serious heart attack, leaving him unable to mediate between squabbling factions in Tehran. Moreover, his hand-picked successor, Ayatollah Hossain Ali Montazari, appears to be under attack from opponents who last week arrested close associates of his.

Recent reports suggest that the heightened factionalism concerns conflicts over the conduct of the war with Iraq and over whether to improve relations with the West to secure badly needed armaments.

The Iranian news agency yesterday quoted the speaker of Iran's parliament, Hashemi Rafsanjani, as saying that Mr. McFarlane and four aides arrived in Iran posing as aircraft crewmen, bearing Irish passports and toting a Bible signed by President Reagan, a cake, and a message calling for an improvement in U.S.-Iranian relations. The news agency said the five were detained for five days before being deported.

U.S. officials, speaking anonymously,

said that while he was national security adviser, Mr. McFarlane had directed the administration's secret efforts to free the hostages in Lebanon. They said Mr. McFarlane's successor, Vice Admiral John Poindexter, has since taken over day-to-day control of the small administration group in charge of U.S. efforts to free the hostages.

The officials said a member of the National Security Council staff, Lt. Col. Oliver North, has made repeated trips to Europe and the Middle East—sometimes in disguise or using an assumed name—during the past two years to meet with informers and possible intermediaries in the hostage drama.

Officials said Col. North flew to Cyprus early last week to meet with Mr. Waite, the Anglican envoy. Some U.S. officials said that while Mr. Waite has performed "heroically," he also has served in part as a "cover" for negotiations with Iran and Islamic Jihad through other channels. In West Germany yesterday, Mr. Waite said: "I don't want to comment on the political dynamics."

U.S. officials said the U.S. has paid some self-proclaimed intermediaries in Lebanon and elsewhere for help in negotiating for the release of the hostages, but they said most such efforts proved useless.

The latest developments were complicated by internal clashes among factions of Iran's Islamic regime. On Oct. 27, several close associates of Ayatollah Montazari were arrested in connection with the kidnapping of a top Syrian diplomat in Tehran earlier in the month.

The diplomat was released a few hours later, but those arrested were also charged with a host of other accusations including murder, seditious activities and crimes against the state.

Ayatollah Montazari was designated last November as constitutional successor to Ayatollah Khomeini, but the decision hasn't been universally accepted by the various groupings in the clergy.

"The arrests are primarily related to an effort by groups within the clergy to discredit Montazari and upset his succession to Khomeini," said Shahrough Akhavi, an Iranian affairs expert at the University of South Carolina. But Mr. Akhavi agreed with other experts that as long as Ayatollah Khomeini is in power, it is difficult to see the Iranian leadership reversing the basic elements of its foreign policy, primarily that the war with Iraq must be pursued until a political or military victory changes the Iraqi regime.

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